DAN GROSS/THE GAZETTE

People cross Twinbrook Parkway at Fishers Lane near the Twinbrook Metro station in Rockville. Four people were killed while crossing Montgomery County streets between January and June, and 174 collisions involved people crossing roads, county data show.

Police to crack down on jaywalkers

■ **Report finds fewer deaths, collisions among walkers**

BY ERIN CUNNINGHAM
STAFF WRITER

Isaac Vanegas briefly looked across the street Monday afternoon before running across a six-lane highway in Rockville, narrowly avoiding oncoming cars.

After crossing Shady Grove Road between intersections, Vanegas, of Olney, said he has been walking part of the way to work for about a month since his car broke down. He occasionally crosses the street outside of a crosswalk, but said he tries to avoid it, and hasn't had any close calls.

"I've been blessed," he said.

However, Vanegas and others who do not use crosswalks soon could be ticketed.

Montgomery County Police announced Friday that officers will begin a zero-tolerance program to crack down on minor moving violations for drivers, such as failing to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk, and for pedestrians, such as jaywalking.

"It's not like we're writing tickets everywhere," said Montgomery Police Capt. Thomas Didone. "But we're saying if you're in a high-incident area and we're conducting enforcement don't expect a warning. Expect a ticket.' Didone, director of traffic operations, said it would be unrealistic to expect officers to write tickets every time they see someone jaywalking or a vehicle failing to yield to pedestrians. It is the same with drivers who do not

use turn signals or use their windshield wipers in the rain, both violations of Maryland traffic laws.

"We have to pick and choose sometimes," he said. "So many people are doing it, we never would get to our call because we would be constantly stopping."

During their enforcements, Didone said, officers will be ticketing drivers who block pedestrian crosswalks, do not yield to pedestrians, run red lights, fail to yield for pedestrians and commit other moving violations that would endanger walkers. Pedestrians will be cited for jaywalking, which is failing to cross at marked crosswalks — a violation that carries a $50 fine. Police also will cite pedestrians for failing to obey crosswalk signals, walking diagonally across intersections and other infractions.

Before now, Didone said officers have handed out brochures and talked with those engaged in risky behavior.

Between October 2010 and June, police identified and spoke with 116 drivers who were not following traffic laws, potentially endangering pedestrians. In that time, they also issued 11 citations to drivers for failing to yield to pedestrians and other violations. During that time, police spoke with 2,598 pedestrians, and cited 11.

The enforcement is part of the county's efforts to improve pedestrian safety — an initiative that began in its current form in 2007.

Four pedestrians were killed in Montgomery County between January and June, and there were 174 collisions that involved pedestrians, county data show. Officials said Friday that if the trend continues, the total number of pedestrian collisions and deaths in the county will be at a seven-year low.

In 2010, there were 436 vehicle collisions with pedestrians, and 13 pedestrians were killed, according to a report from CountyStat, an oversight department for the county government.

The county spent a combined $8.5 million on pedestrian safety, including roadway infrastructure and education, in fiscal years 2010 and 2011. In fiscal 2012, which began July 1, the county plans to spend $3.1 million.

The bulk of the money has been spent to expand sidewalks and improve signs and crosswalks in areas of the county with high numbers of pedestrian crashes.

Officials say the parts of the county with a history of crashes involving pedestrians are the highly traveled corridors of Piney Branch Road, Wisconsin Avenue, Georgia Avenue, Rockville Pike, Four Corners, Reedie Drive, Randolph Road and Connecticut Avenue.

Most of Montgomery's pedestrian safety work is focused in those areas, where pedestrian-related collisions declined from 43 in 2009 to 18 in 2010.

Montgomery Police said drivers are at fault in about 60 percent of reported crashes with pedestrians.

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